

The Register-Guard

Books help parents, kids engage in climate activism

By Bob Doppelt

Posted Jul 26, 2018 at 12:01 AM

Last month in The Boston Globe, Dr. James Hansen, former head of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies and one of the first scientists to warn Congress about the coming climate crisis, said our failure to slash carbon emissions has left our children with a big mess. But he also said, “It is not too late. My advice to young people is to cast off the old politics and fight for their future on technological, political, and legal fronts.”

Two new books can help parents and children follow Hansen’s advice. “The Parents’ Guide to Climate Revolution: 100 Ways to Build a Fossil-Free Future, Raise Empowered Kids, and Still Get a Good Night’s Sleep” is by Mary DeMocker, co-founder of the Eugene chapter of 350.org.

DeMocker told me she has been an activist since childhood. When she started her family, she focused on personal lifestyle changes. But she eventually realized that was insufficient because “temperatures kept rising.” So she began to use “humor, story telling, and theater” to engage her kids and others in climate activism.

She found that “her kids got happier the more engaged they became.” And, “the more other parents and their kids got involved, the happier they became.”

“The climate crisis is really a parenting problem” says DeMocker. Parents often must assert their authority to prevent their children from engaging in harmful activities and show them how to act responsibly.

Similarly, parents need to assert their rightful authority to “stop stupid,” by which she means halting short-sighted activities that threaten their children’s future such as burning fossil fuels and clear-cutting forests. Parents also have a responsibility to

“start smart” — advocating for renewable energy, planting trees and engaging in other activities that help ensure that their kids can grow up on a livable planet.

DeMocker is not just talking about changing light bulbs. A “full-scale climate revolution” is required to make the transition to a clean energy, low-carbon future. Parents can “inspire and empower your kids” to bring about that revolution by engaging in the activities described in the book’s 100 short chapters that are organized into eight sections.

The first section calls on parents to “Harmonize Family Life-Ways with Earth-Ways.” Its 18 chapters focus on actions like “Get Clear on Why There’s Hope,” “Ditch the Diaper,” and “Get Electrified.” The section “Save Money and Time” includes 13 chapters focused on actions like “Revamping Gift Giving” and “Be a WIMBY (Wind in My Backyard!).”

Other sections range from “Care for the Soul” to “Raising Empowered Kids,” “Growing Community Connections” and “Build a Fossil-Free Future.” Most chapters begin with a humorous story taken from DeMocker’s 21 years as a parent, and then offer sensible, fun activities kids and parents can engage in to help protect the climate.

DeMocker says parents should “always choose systems change over light-bulb change,” and should not underestimate their power. “We just have to give ourselves the authority to flip the switch from stupid to smart.”

A new book about climate change for children 4 to 11 years old is “The Tantrum That Saved the World” by Megan Herbert and climate scientist Michael Mann. It uses pictures to tell the story of Sophia, a girl who is constantly disturbed by people and animals harmed by rising global temperatures that knock on her door seeking help. Although initially irritated, she eventually realizes she has a responsibility to help. So she learns about the climate change and organizes rallies to involve the public and elected officials in solutions.

Both books are educational and inspiring. They will help parents and kids respond constructively respond to James Hansen’s call to action and engage in meaningful climate solutions.

Bob Doppelt of Eugene is executive director of the Resource Innovation Group and writes a monthly column for The Register-Guard on issues relating to climate change and sustainability.